

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Michael Preedin      Mayor  
Andrea Blum          Council President  
Jennifer Letz        Councilor  
Gary Ross            Councilor  
Susan Cobb          Councilor

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Jordan Wheeler      City Manager  
Kerry Prosser      Assistant City Manager  
Joe O’Neill          Finance Director  
Scott Woodford      CDD Director  
Paul Bertagna        PW Director  
Matt Martin          Principal Planner  
Chad Davis            Lt. DCSO

**GUESTS:**

Peter Hoover          Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity  
Joe Rambo            Board Chair, Habitat for Humanity  
Clayton Crowhurst    Northwest Housing Alternatives  
Roger Johnson        Chief, Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire District  
Jarod Bearson        DSCO Deputy

The meeting recording can be found [here](#).

Mayor Preedin called the workshop to order at 5:00 p.m.

**1. Deschutes County Sheriff Office (DCSO) Update**

Lt. Davis reviewed:

- Sisters had received a new Dodge pickup as a patrol vehicle.
- Deputy Westfall was participating in threat assessment training for juveniles.
- DCSO participated in the Holiday parade.

Lt. Davis introduced Deputy Jarod Bearson as the newest member of the Sisters team. Deputy Bearson started his career in Troutdale and then worked for the Linn County Sheriff’s Office. He had 12 years of experience and moved his family to Central Oregon about two years ago.

**2. Habitat for Humanity**

Joe Rambo, the Board Chair for Habitat for Humanity, discussed recent changes at Habitat and their decision to focus on workforce housing. He reviewed a [presentation](#) that highlighted the widening gap between those who could and could not afford homes in Sisters. Sisters Habitat was expanding their mission to cover a broader income range (80-150% AMI). Mr. Rambo reviewed the organization’s plan to develop cottage cluster housing on their property off of Adams Avenue; He was seeking partnership with the city and potentially using urban renewal funds, System Development Charge (SDC) deferrals, SDC credits, and other incentives for the project.

Executive Director Peter Hoover noted the workforce housing initiative was in addition to, not a diversion from, their ongoing efforts in affordable housing. They were continuing

developments in Village Meadows, Brooks Camp, and Woodlands. He emphasized their commitment to increasing the annual production of affordable homes and their goal to align their workforce housing plan with the city's housing needs.

Councilor Ross asked if the properties were deed-restricted to ensure they stayed affordable. Mr. Rambo replied there would be a combination of deed restriction and land trusts.

Councilor Cobb asked for clarity on the AMI of the project. Mr. Rambo anticipated a mixed-income development with a roughly equal number of workforce (80-150% of AMI) and affordable housing. Councilor Cobb asked what would happen to the profit for the project. Mr. Rambo noted with the cost of land, building prices, and their commitment to selling at an affordable price, they would not have to worry about profit. Councilor Cobb asked if they would ensure these cottages could not be short-term rentals. Mr. Hoover replied that Habitat's land trust model had restrictions on the owner using the property at their primary residence.

Councilor Letz asked what the timeline was for this project. Mr. Rambo replied they were hoping to start the project by October 2025.

Mayor Preedin expressed excitement about the potential partnership with Habitat for workforce housing and was willing to explore the collaboration. He noted that not all requests could be fulfilled but acknowledged the need for more affordable housing. He found the concept of the cottage development unique. Mayor Preedin suggested ongoing outreach to ensure the community was informed about the project.

Councilor Ross asked if priority would be given to people who worked in Sisters. Mr. Rambo said priority would be given to locals. Councilor Ross asked if the project would have solar. Mr. Rambo noted that the Habitat Board approved putting solar panels on their upcoming houses at Village Meadow and hoped to do the same for this project.

Mayor Preedin thanked the presenters and looked forward to more conversations about the project.

### **3. Northwest Housing Alternative Project Update**

Clayton Crowhurst, Northwest Housing Alternatives (NHA), provided an update on the Trinity Place project for affordable and workforce rental housing. They had secured nearly \$10 million in funding, including grants and agriculture worker housing tax credits. The project should break ground in early 2025, with leasing scheduled for 2026. Mr. Crowhurst highlighted ongoing fundraising efforts to address construction gaps and outlined the project schedule. He emphasized the importance of community outreach, especially with

neighbors to address concerns about the project.

The Council discussed the funding gaps and the impacts on the project.

Council President Blum asked if we were still on track for some flexibility in the income levels of the people who would live in the apartments. Mr. Crowhurst said they were capped at 80% AMI on the upper side. Council President Blum asked if we had any control over who would receive the housing. Mr. Crowhurst was having ongoing conversations with local partners to establish referral preferences and soft-touch methods to prioritize community members without violating legal restrictions on asking for specific information.

Mayor Preedin was grateful for the conversations between NHA and Habitat for Humanity; it was essential to have open communication to address concerns and work towards shared goals. Mr. Crowhurst explained that everyone in the affordable housing world liked to collaborate. He also recognized that in a small community, we never wanted to be in a position where we were competing for the same funding source; collaboration was critical to all of us.

#### **4. Wildfire Hazard Mitigation Building Code/Defensible Space Code Update**

Planner Martin reviewed the purpose of the workshop was to work towards updating defensible space and structural hardening requirements in response to the increased risk of wildfires in the Sisters area. He introduced Chief Roger Johnson from the Sisters Camp Sherman Fire District and representatives from the Oregon State Fire Marshal's office. Chief Johnson appreciated the Council's focus on this critical issue.

Planner Martin said the project was identified as a priority by the City Council, given the community's location in the wildland-urban interface and the changing environmental conditions. The focus was on introducing strategies and seeking input from Council members on priorities and concepts. Planner Martin reviewed a [presentation](#) that included an overview of defensible space and structural hardening, existing Sisters code standards, upcoming statewide standards, and examples of best practices from Oregon communities.

Chief Johnson addressed concerns about limited space for defensible zones, especially when houses were close together. He emphasized the critical importance of the immediate zone (zero to 5 feet) in determining a home's survival during a wildfire.

Councilor Cobb shared concerns related to fire safety, including buffer zones on small lots, street accessibility for emergency vehicles, burning regulations, and the transition to underground utilities in areas with overhead power lines.

Planner Martin discussed building hardening, focusing on home hardening to enhance fire resilience. He highlighted various elements susceptible to fire risks and opportunities for improvement, including ongoing property maintenance. Key points included:

- Roof Maintenance: Installing and maintaining high-fire-resistance roofs, avoiding wood roofing materials, and replacing damaged shingles.
- Vents and Penetrations: Ensuring proper screening for vents and other penetrations to prevent fire embers from entering the structure.
- Eaves and Windows: Addressing potential penetration points such as eaves and windows with appropriate screening and fire-resistant materials.
- Siding: Using fire-resistant siding materials to reduce the risk of fire spreading.
- Fencing: Creating a buffer between combustible wooden fencing materials and structures, considering non-combustible materials in the immediate zone.
- Storage Practices: Properly storing combustible items to minimize fire hazards.

Planner Martin said these building code measures could be implemented in the City of Sisters to mitigate fire risks.

Chief Johnson addressed concerns about the potential costs associated with implementing fire-resilient building standards. He said many elements required for building hardening were common in construction practices, such as double-pane windows and Class A-rated asphalt composition shingles for roofs. He noted that the focus is often on details like venting size and siding material, and many builders were already using fire-resistant materials like fiber cement siding.

Planner Martin discussed the existing codes and regulations related to defensible space and building hardening in the City of Sisters. He highlighted that the current development code lacked specific defensible space standards, though there were strategies related to fire safety, access, and landscaping.

Planner Martin discussed the upcoming statewide standards resulting from Senate Bill 762 and Senate Bill 80, including developing a wildfire risk map by the Oregon Department of Forestry. The Oregon State Fire Marshal's office had drafted defensible space standards based on best practices, and the State Building Codes Division would update the residential specialty code (R 327) for building hardening standards. Planner Martin noted that our local standards could be more detailed than the statewide standards but could not be less restrictive.

Planner Martin discussed the importance of learning from other jurisdictions in addressing wildfire hazards and mitigation. He highlighted the comprehensive approach taken by the city of Ashland in Southern Oregon, emphasizing their use of fire prevention and control plans for larger developments.

Planner Martin presented options for the Council to consider, including:

- Wait and See: Observe and align with state standards when they were established.
- Local Adoption of R327 Building Code Standards: Implement the statewide residential specialty code (R327) locally, with potential additional provisions.
- Adopt State Fire Marshal's Defensible Space Standards: Implement the state fire marshal's drafted defensible space standards.
- Refine Strategies Based on Best Practices: Explore and adopt a collective set of strategies from various jurisdictions and refine them as needed.

The Council discussed the state wildfire map and its potential impact on the city.

Planner Martin said the city was not tied to the wildfire map; we had the opportunity to be more restrictive or adopt our own wildfire hazard map.

Mayor Preedin thought that if half of the town was considered high risk on a fire map, the entire town should be treated as high risk. He proposed setting specific standards for fire safety and not waiting for the release of the state fire hazard map.

Councilor Ross said the longer we waited to implement these standards the more new construction would need retrofitting. He thought the Council would be remiss in their duties if they continued to wait for the state to implement these codes.

Council President Blum said it would be prudent if we knew what properties this code would impact; if a subdivision had only a few vacant lots, the homes could look different than the other houses with the new standards. Councilor Ross thought you could build a home with defensible space and fire-hardened and still have it look like it belonged in the neighborhood.

Councilor Cobb thought we were doing two things. First, the development code would be modified to enhance clarity regarding building hardening. Second, there would be a focus on existing homes and defensible space. Councilor Cobb suggested doing assessments of areas at the highest risk. She thought we could counsel residents and offer resources for fire mitigation and fuel clearing. Councilor Cobb also suggested exploring options for financial assistance through external organizations.

Councilor Letz noted there were various components to the code modifications. She wondered about the feasibility of tackling these changes simultaneously or if there was a recommended sequential approach.

From a fire protection standpoint, Chief Johnson supported the idea of implementing changes in the municipal code before building more housing made a lot of sense. He said

they were already training their staff to perform defensible space home assessments and were providing that service voluntarily.

Planner Martin proposed examining new development-related priorities first and then considering building hardening as a secondary concern. The idea was to prioritize policy development and implementation, chipping away at the issues step by step.

Councilor Ross would like to look at the building hardening standards first and not wait for the state.


Councilor Letz asked if staff would be comfortable if the Council adopted R327 as a starting point so we did not have to reinvent the wheel. Planner Martin replied it had been around for several years, and local governments and counties have had the option to adopt R327 for 4 or 5 years. He thought it was a solid code.

Mayor Preedin asked staff to keep working on this code update and hoped it could be finished this fiscal year.

**5. Other Business - None**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

  
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Kerry Prosser, Recorder

  
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Michael Preedin, Mayor